

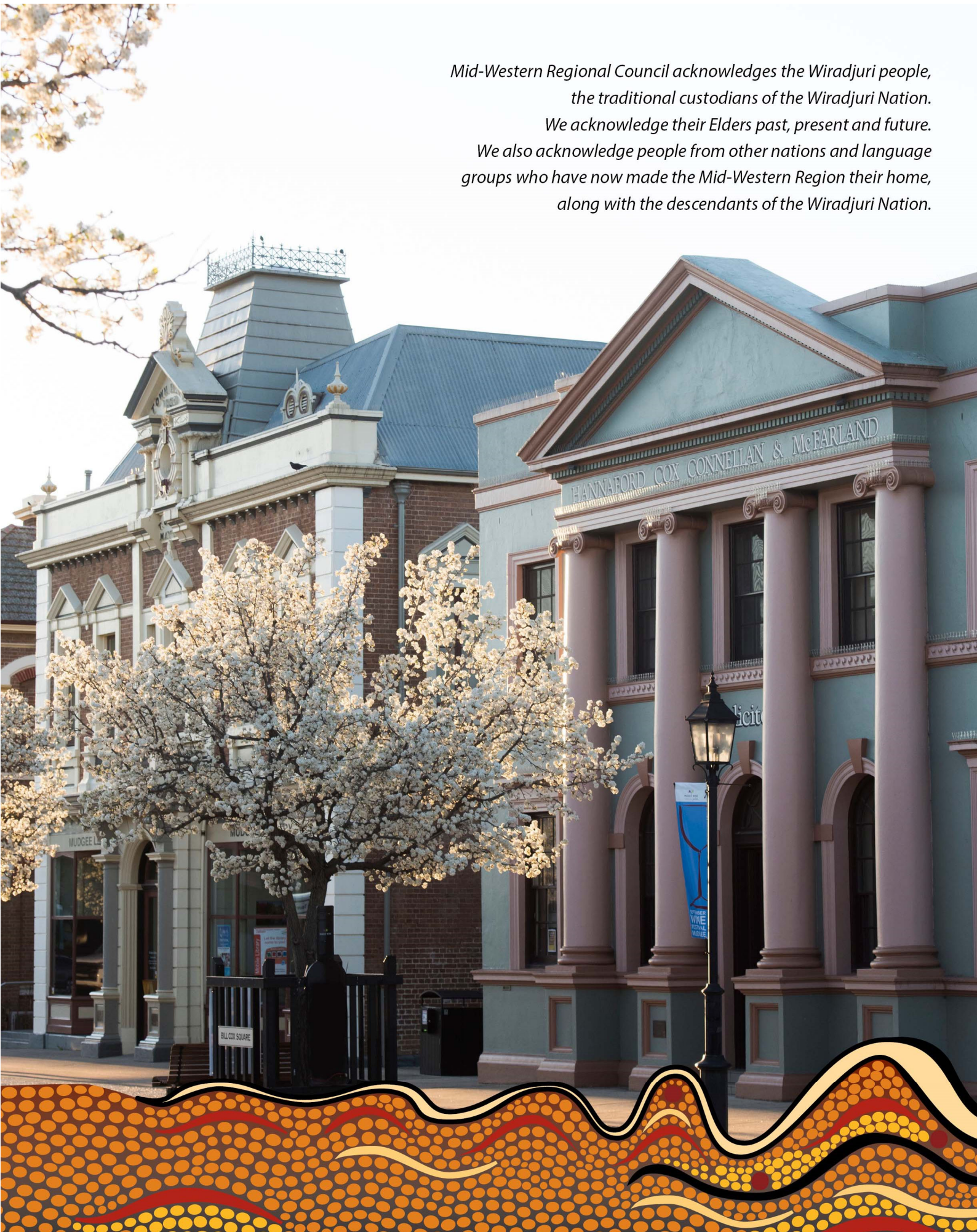
# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

MID-WESTERN REGIONAL COUNCIL

**NOVEMBER 2024**



*Mid-Western Regional Council acknowledges the Wiradjuri people,  
the traditional custodians of the Wiradjuri Nation.  
We acknowledge their Elders past, present and future.  
We also acknowledge people from other nations and language  
groups who have now made the Mid-Western Region their home,  
along with the descendants of the Wiradjuri Nation.*



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Residents of the Mid-Western Region are living in a modern and growing local government area committed to continuous improvement.

Mid-Western Regional Council is continuously working to engage our community in a diverse range of methods to reach all stakeholders so that our community have input to the decision making processes shaping our local government area.

The development of the Community Engagement Strategy 2024 – 2028 is based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing plans, determining and prioritising key activities and gathering feedback on services delivered by Council.

## 1.2 What is community engagement?

Community engagement enables the community to have a say on matters that may impact or interest them.

It is strategic, information sharing and collecting with the purpose of working with the community and stakeholders to make better informed decisions.

It does not replace the final decision-making power of Council, but enhances Council's capacity to make well informed and sustainable decisions.

## 1.3 Why do we engage?

Mid-Western Regional Council is committed to listening to our community's views. The data collected from community engagement is then used in conjunction with accompanying information such as technical, financial and legislative requirements to help Council make better decisions.

Our residents and business owners have a wealth of knowledge to contribute and in return, Council want to make informed decisions that provide the best outcome for our community.

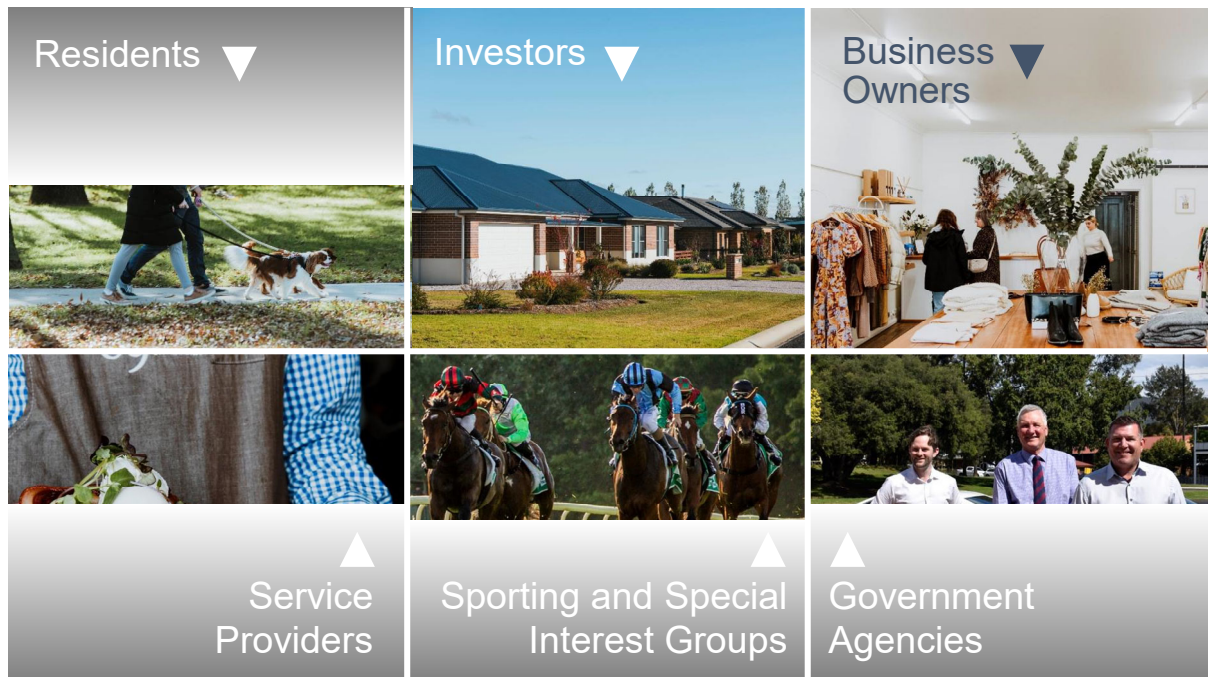
Community participation in decision-making:

- Improves communication and understanding of the process and the outcome
- Creates better relationships between the community and the Council
- Enhances a sense of community pride and ownership
- Builds community capacity to be involved in local government decision making

## 1.4 Who do we engage with?

When referring to stakeholders this includes individuals and groups of people living, working or spending time in the Mid-Western Region.

### STAKEHOLDER GROUPS



### ALL INDIVIDUALS BUT NOT LIMITED TO:



## 2. How do we engage?

Mid-Western Regional Council uses a multitude of engagement tools to reach out to the community. A range of tools are used so that all community stakeholders have the opportunity to provide feedback and contribute to decisions that affect our local government area. Consideration is given to different age groups, disabilities, culture, minority groups, location and busy working families.

### 2.1 Principles that underpin engagement



### 2.2 Mid-Western Regional Council engagement tools

The tools Mid-Western Regional Council may use to engage the community and stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

- **Surveys**

Surveys seek to examine community attitudes and perceptions towards current and future services and facilities provided by Council. Surveys are designed to engage the community and capture data which provides a statistically significant representation of the community's attitudes and perceptions. These can be presented digitally, paper based, in person or over the phone and tailored to ask specific questions with a range of options available for responses.

### ■ **Stakeholder Workshops**

Workshops are utilised to focus on qualitative information gathering in key themes and gather feedback in relation to the levels of importance and satisfaction with underlying strategies or services.

### ■ **Community Roadshows**

The Community Roadshows may involve a portable display being assembled in each of the main towns of Mudgee, Gulgong, Kandos and Rylstone in a prominent position to capture pedestrian traffic. The portable displays act to inform and engage the community increasing general awareness of the key issues whilst providing information and feedback to Council. There are a range of participatory activities which the community are able to use to reveal their key priorities and engage with Council staff. The mobile library service may be used to provide access to Community Roadshows for residents in the villages.

### ■ **Permanent Displays**

Each of Council's Administration Centres/Libraries may host a permanent display over a period of community engagement. These displays may include signage and activities for the community to complete whilst they are visiting Council's offices and buildings. These displays may be used to relay information to target groups.

### ■ **Direct Mail Out / Letterbox Drop**

A direct mail out or letterbox drop to residents (either through Community News or separately sent) provides another outlet by which residents can participate in the community engagement process and have their say. This tool is used to inform the community and provide feedback. Information contained in these communications assist in opening two way communication with Council feedback tools being presented and promoted in these documents.

### ■ **Public Exhibition**

Draft Council documents including Policies, Budgets, Plans and Strategies will be placed on public exhibition for a period of 28 days prior to being formally adopted by Council. For Development Applications the public exhibition time is 14 days. The public exhibition period allow residents to review the draft documents and make public submissions. The Mid-Western Regional Council Community Participation Plan provides further detailed information regarding development activities. This can be found on Council's website [www.midwestern.nsw.gov.au](http://www.midwestern.nsw.gov.au)

### ■ **Local Media / Media Releases and Alerts**

Local media can be used for promotion of events, provide critical information during an emergency or be used to encourage participation and educate the community about the process of reviewing and developing key Council Plans and Strategies.

### ■ **Council Website**

Redesigned in December 2021, Council's website provides an important information outlet with links to 100 digital forms and applications that can be submitted online. The website offers a self-service option and is a tool to educate the community about the key themes and relevant documents comprising the IP&R framework. There are a number of opportunities for the community to engage Council with feedback options including;

- Reporting a problem with a public facility or infrastructure
- Direct links to public exhibition documents and contact details for submissions and comment
- Webcasting of Council meetings

- **Community News – distributed to all households in the region monthly**  
Community News features regular updates about the activities being undertaken and reminding residents about the importance of capturing the views of a broad cross-section of the community. Community News can also be used as a direct mail tool to encourage participation in and completion of activities.
- **Social Media**  
Council’s social media platforms assist in reinforcing educational messages and encouraging participation in engagement activities. It informs the community of key events and provides links to online engagement activities. Social media can be targeted to particular audiences through boosting advertising to specific audiences.
- **Door Knocking**  
Where required Council will door knock in smaller villages to ensure individuals living in more remote locations are notified of important information. Door knocking can also be used when a specific street is impacted by an event.
- **Postcards**  
Postcards make it is easy to participate in and catered for all ages (ie children and adults). A postcard can include targeted questions to prompt the community in their responses, making it a quick and simple task.
- **Open Feedback Forms**  
Open feedback forms are specifically designed to capture information and allow free text for ideas or support to be relayed to Council. This allows the community to document any other feedback or issues that they feel has not been addressed or is relevant for consideration by Council.
- **SMS**  
Outbound SMS is used when information is time sensitive or requires immediate broadcast and where phone numbers are available.
- **Targeted Electronic Digital Mail**  
Targeted electronic digital mail is used to connect to residents, visitors, community groups and businesses for a multitude of purposes. This may be to provide general information, deliver the Community News digitally, and target information to specific user groups or to encourage engagement and feedback. Targeted electronic digital mail can also be a vehicle to deliver online surveys.
- **Rates and Water Notices**  
Rates and water notices are used as a tool to provide information to the community and encourage participation in engagement activities. These notices are delivered by post and digital mail.
- **Public Forums**  
Members of the public can address Council at the Public Forum before each regular monthly meeting, commencing at 5:30pm. Speakers are given five minutes to present any issue of relevance to the Council. Presenters are not permitted to direct questions to Councillors, although Councillors may question the speakers.

## 2.3 Who do our engagement tools reach?

		Residents	Elderly	People with Disabilities	Youth	Remote	Visitors	Cultural/ community grps	Business	Schools	Govt agencies
General communication	Community News – online and mail out	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y					
	Rates / Water Notices – online and mail out	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y		
	Social Media (FB, Tik Tok, Instagram)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	Media Releases/Engagement	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	Customer Service Centre	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Council Website	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Direct Mail Out	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
	Radio Interviews	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	Permanent Displays	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
	Public Exhibition	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
	SMS	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y					
	Electronic Direct Mail (EDM)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Online/digital tools for community engagement and participation	Surveys	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
	Council Website	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Social Media	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	Postcards	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y		
	Online Surveys	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	
	Open Feedback Forms	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	SMS	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y					
Face to face community engagement and participation	Electronic Direct Mail (EDM)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	
	Facilitated Workshops	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
	Community Roadshow	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y					
	Door-knocking	Y				Y					
	Key Stakeholder Meetings	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y
	Public Forums	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	

## 2.4 The level of engagement

The Community Engagement Strategy is intended to make it easier for the community to understand how to participate in Council decisions and strategies. Every project is different, which requires scoping and planning to determine the most suitable tool used for each engagement.

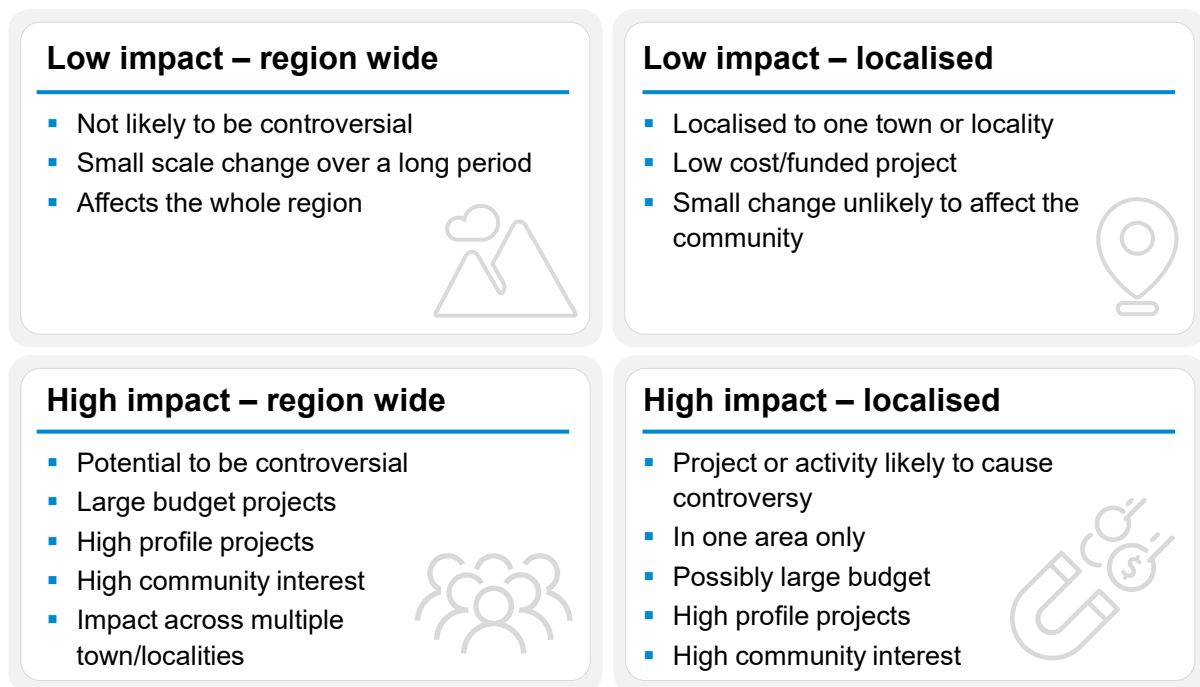
Stakeholders are identified in each project and the expected level of interest from the community and impact assessment will determine the level of engagement required. The communication and engagement methods are then chosen to support the level of engagement required.

## Mid-Western Regional Council Engagement Process



## Level of engagement required based on impact assessment

When assessing the level of engagement required on any project, the extent of the impact of that project must be considered. The impact may be real or perceived and are classified as follows:



## 2.5 How do we close the loop?

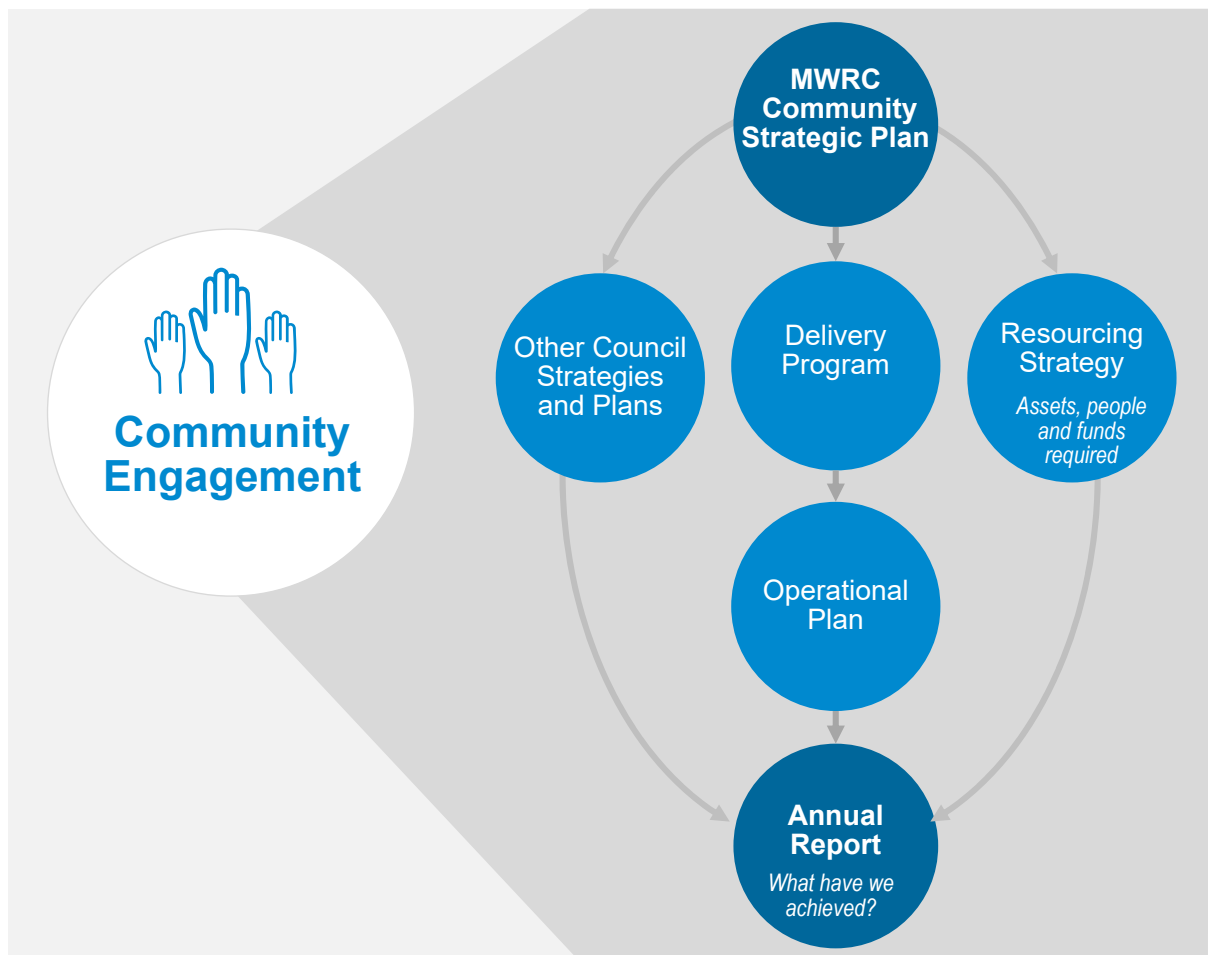
It is important that Council closes the loop and provides feedback to stakeholders and participants on the outcomes and decisions made. This demonstrates that input is both considered and valued in the decision making process. As levels of engagement will vary from project to project feedback may be in the following forms:

- Mid-Western Regional Council website [www.midwestern.nsw.gov.au](http://www.midwestern.nsw.gov.au)
- Notification to impacted residents / properties
- Through the library or customer service buildings
- Through electronic digital mail
- Social media
- Mail out to residents
- Community News
- Media release

### 3. How does it all fit together?

#### 3.1 Strategic planning framework

All local councils across the state are required to plan and report in line with the NSW Office of Local Government's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework. This "recognises that most communities share similar aspirations: a safe, healthy and pleasant place to live, a sustainable environment, opportunities for social interaction, opportunities for education and employment, and reliable infrastructure. The difference lies in how each community responds to these needs. It also recognises that council plans and policies should not exist in isolation and that they are inter-connected. This framework allows NSW councils to draw their various plans together, understand how they interact and get the maximum leverage from their efforts by planning holistically and sustainably for the future."



The following Mid-Western Regional Council documents form our Strategic Planning Framework.

## Community Plan

Our Community Plan is a ‘big picture’ plan based around the five outcomes our community has told us will improve the Mid-Western region as a place to live, work, invest and visit. These are long term goals and Council cannot deliver them alone – we need to work with State and Federal government, businesses, other organisations and our community to achieve these outcomes together. Our Community Plan not only sets out where we want to be, but also where we are now and how we’ll know we’re on the right track.

## Delivery Program and Operational Plan

Our Delivery Program, which incorporates our Operational Plan, sets out Council’s role in delivering the seven outcomes over the four years from 2024-2028. It’s our commitment to our community, and includes the services, activities and projects we will deliver, our annual budget, our detailed works programs and how we will measure our performance to ensure we’re delivering the right services, the best way we can.

## Resourcing Strategy

We cannot deliver the services the community needs without properly managing our people, our assets and our money. The Resourcing Strategy looks at the key risks and opportunities we’re likely to face over the next 10 years, and how they may impact our long-term financial sustainability. It looks at how we will use our resources and what we need to do to ensure our assets and our workforce are best placed to deliver on our commitments over the next four years.

## 3.2 Roles and responsibilities

### Community

- Receive and consider information provided by Council related to community engagement projects
- Participate in engagement activities
- Provide valuable and constructive feedback to Council

### Councillors

- Responsible for decision making whilst considering community feedback in conjunction with accompanying information such as technical, financial, legislative requirements
- Promote engagement on key strategic plans
- Participate in the development of Integrated Planning and Reporting documents
- Promote partnership between key stakeholders and Council

## Council Staff

- Ensure Council policies and procedures are followed
- Ensure community engagement is carried out as per the policies and procedures approved by Council
- Provide Council with technical, financial and legislative information and reports to assist Council to make informed decisions
- Analyse feedback from community engagement activities and use this information to provide informed recommendations to Council
- Communicate the outcome of decisions made by Council to the Community
- Evaluating the effectiveness of community engagement activities
- Ensuring adequate feedback is relayed to stakeholders and participants in engagement activities

## Consultants and contractors

- Deliver engagement activities in line with Council policy and procedures as directed by Council Staff

### 3.3 Public exhibition

The Local Government Act, NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and other legislation requires Council to publicly display certain documents for a prescribed amount of time for public comment. Mid-Western Regional Council documents are available on public exhibition through our website [www.midwestern.nsw.gov.au](http://www.midwestern.nsw.gov.au) or at our offices:

Mudgee	86 Market Street	Monday to Friday	8am–4.30pm
Gulgong	109 Herbert Street	Monday to Friday	8am–4.30pm
Rylstone	77 Louee Street	Monday to Friday	8am–4.30pm (closed for lunch 1–2pm)

### Public exhibition (where required) and timeframes

Draft policies, plans, budgets and strategies	28 days
Draft Strategic Plan	28 days
Draft contribution plans	28 days
Development applications	14 days
Draft community participation plans	28 days
Draft planning proposals for local environmental plans	28 days
Environmental impact plans	28 days